Bullying and Peer Bystanders

Article Critique

Lesley Taylor Swartz

Liberty University

**Annotated Bilbliography/Summary**

Bullying in the school continues to be a problem, despite the many attempts to combat and intervene. There are numerous articles, which address the roles of the bully and the bullied; however, this one addresses the role of the peer bystander. The peer bystander actually holds a powerful position in which to either fan the flames of bullying behavior or to extinguish them. Like many researchers and authors, Lodge and Frydenberg (2005), distinguish bullying to be that of physical, psychological, and emotional aggression, with the intent to harm another. While many authors and researchers believe the bullying phenomenon to be driven by the perception of differences among individuals, such as appearance, fashion, values, etc., Lodge and Frydenberg regard bullying to be driven by aggressive behavior.

The contention of the authors is that the reactions, or lack of, by the peer bystander, when witnessing a case of bullying, are influenced by many factors. The authors also indicate that the communication to and training of students at an early age are critical when it comes to achieving a solution to this problem.

**Critique**

The clear message of the article is that peer bystanders, who are otherwise, neither the bullies nor the bullied, have a tremendous influence over the overall bullying phenomenon. The authors reference a study, which revealed that more than half of students, who witness bullying behavior, do nothing, in other words, they passively stand by. By passively watching an incident of bullying, the peer bystander is actually prolonging and encouraging this bullying behavior, as they make themselves a participant in the act, otherwise known as the audience.

In the study by Lodge and Frydenberg (2005), peers bystanders were questioned about their reactions to several verbal bully scenarios. Overall, most peers felt sadness for the victim and anger toward the bully. There was a desire to intervene on behalf of the victim; however, they chose not to for various reasons. The peers verbalized reasons for not intervening such as a fear of being bullied themselves, not wanting to be the only one to intervene, and not knowing how to intervene.

In the scenarios provided to the students in the study, it was revealed that self-esteem, emotional support from friends, and productive coping strategies, or the lack of, were all factors in the peer bystanders’ reactions. The bystanders who supported the victim were said to have high self-esteem, high emotional support, and used more productive coping strategies and the reverse was true for the bystanders who joined with the bullies or passively watched.

The recommendation of the authors was to intervene school-wide, by teaching cognitive-based skill development and coping skills at an early age. Examples of skills, which can be taught, are problem solving, communication, decision making, goal setting, and time management skills. Research has revealed that by learning and applying these skills will lead to self-efficacy in students. In addition, coping skills will help students learn how to use productive coping strategies in trying times and situations, now and in the future.

If students grow up learning coping mechanisms and cognitive-based skills, they will learn to make better decisions as children, adolescents, and adults. But for now, by intervening with these skills and strategies, the hope is that adolescents, who find themselves as peer bystanders to a bully situation, will become proactive in resolving this phenomenon.

**Reference:**

Lodge, J. & Frydenberg, E. (2005). The role of peer bystanders in school bullying: Positive steps toward promoting peaceful schools. *Theory Into Practice,* 44(4), p.329-336.